

SECRETARY OF DEFENSE WILLIAM J. PERRY
INTERVIEW WITH NATIONAL PUBLIC RADIO, WITH CLARIFICATIONS
PENTAGON
APRIL 26, 1994

Q: Why don't you just update us, if you will, on the situation in Gorazde and what you expect when the deadline passes.

A: The best information we have now is that the Serbs are complying with the ultimatum. They have pulled all of their forces out beyond the three kilometer line, they have obeyed the ceasefire, and we see much evidence they're moving their heavy weapons out beyond the 20 kilometer. We don't have full information. They haven't reached the deadline yet, and it's cloudy weather over there today, which makes it hard to verify. But to the extent we have information that suggests they're complying, so I'm cautiously optimistic.

Q: When you say your best information, one of the problems are UN peacekeepers on the ground. Are there enough to really monitor the situation at this point? Are you confident in the information you're getting?

A: There were not a few days ago, but we now have over 400 peacekeepers on the ground, and I believe over the next few days we will have enough people on the ground that we can monitor that situation adequately. It will be helped quite a bit if the weather clears up and we have the advantage of aerial reconnaissance as well.

Q: Tell us a little bit about the last weekend, with the confusion with the UN wanting air strikes, Akashi saying no. What kinds of frustrations were there? We're confused by the stories we're getting out of there. What's your most accurate assessment of what happened over the weekend when the reports came out that NATO wanted air strikes?

A: What happened was that on Saturday both the UN and NATO saw the same facts and interpreted it the same way, but they had a different judgment on how to react to them. Both of them agreed that the Bosnian Serb forces had not complied with the ultimatum on Saturday. Both of them observed that the Serbs were moving in a direction which suggested they were preparing to comply. NATO simply took the letter of the law and said they have not complied, and therefore, they proposed a strike. The United Nations, and in particular Mr. Akashi, said let's wait and see, and we will wait until tomorrow morning. If they have not complied by then, then he said we'll have a strike.

So he waited. Since under the NATO resolution they had to seek the authority of the UN before they could begin the strike, Mr. Akashi had the final word on it. As it turned out, he was right. They did comply by Sunday morning and have complied since then.

Q: Whether he turned out to be right, how do you feel in general about making a threat like that? There was a deadline, they were supposed to stop shelling, have a ceasefire, and they didn't. Would that fall into an empty threat? How do you keep telling someone this is going to happen and it doesn't happen, and then say we're heading for that direction instead of being, like you said, the letter of the law. Where do you fall on that?

A: I think it was not at all an empty threat. Had they been shelling Sunday morning we would all have discovered how non-empty the threat was. We had a huge fleet of NATO attack bombers who were ready to go in there Sunday morning, and would have been authorized to go in Sunday morning should they still have been shelling.

Q: As far as the rest of the safe areas go, is NATO prepared, and is the UN prepared, could we really protect those areas? Are there enough people on the ground? How could you possibly monitor those areas and do the same thing if the Bosnian Serbs just keep moving?

A: What we can do with air power alone is that we can attack the heavy weapons -- the artillery, the tanks, the big mortars -- from shelling the city, and we can do that rather effectively with air power. The threat of that... There are two advantages of that from the point of view of what we're trying to achieve. The first is that if the Serbs insist on shelling, then we make them pay a very heavy price for it. We can't stop them completely with air power. We certainly can't stop the infantry forces from going in. But we take away a lot of the advantage they have with their heavy weapons, because their big advantage over the Muslim forces is that they have the heavy weapons, the tanks, the artillery, and the Muslims have them only in very small quantities.

The bigger advantage, though, is that in seeing this resolve and understanding the price they're going to have to pay if they persist in that, the Serbs have decided, and we hope that they will decide, that it was not worth the gamble, that they would back off and give up the attack altogether. And indeed, that's what they did in Sarajevo, and that's what they're now doing in Gorazde.

We now have four other safe areas to consider. If they choose to attack one of those other safe areas, then it would be the same situation. Our air power would be sufficient to make them pay a very heavy price for the heavy weapons if they

choose, but it could not, in and of itself, prevent an attack. So you count on the deterrent value rather than on it being an absolute military weapon.

Q: I have to go back, and you'll keep doing it, probably, for the rest of your life with the Meet the Press Interview, when you talked about not intervening to stop the fall of Gorazde, and General Shalikashvili a few days later said he didn't think conditions were right, what did change that it was appropriate?

A: Two points to make on that. First is that the first approximation, it was not a change, it was just a different interpretation, a wrong interpretation of what I had said. What I had said was that we would not use air power, that we would not intervene -- in fact in the previous question I answered, I did say we would use air power, but air power under these very limited authorizations that we have in the United Nations for close air support. Indeed, when the UN called for close air support we provided it. I fully supported that. I would have supported it at the time I made the statement.

What I did say, when pressed by the questioner, is that we would not enter the war. What I meant by that, and what I thought was clear by that, was that we would not enter the war as a combatant. We would not take sides in the war. But we're prepared now and we were prepared then to use military power to help in the peacekeeping part of the operation.

What I have learned from that, a very valuable lesson, is that one has to be very careful in an interview, to not make a statement which sounds by itself as a five second sound bite, and cannot have the elaborating discussion with it. Because in the interview it was very clear, if you read the rest of the interview, that I was in favor of, and strongly in favor of the use of air power to assist in the peacekeeping operations, but I was not in favor of air power, and we had no authority to use air power as a combatant in the war. We still do not have authority to use air power as a combatant in the war. We have more authority to use air power now than we had then, because the latest NATO resolution allows us to use general air strikes to support these six safe haven areas like we then had it for just Sarajevo.

Q: So you're saying there was no daylight between you and the Administration and the State Department on that issue.

A: Not at all. I may disagree with the State Department on some issues, but we did not disagree on that issue. We both agreed, the whole Administration believed, that the use of air power to support the UN resolutions was an appropriate and an effective use of air power. We also believed then and believe now that we're not using our military power as a combatant in the war. Those are two very different situations.

Q: Explain a little further, and I'm going to bring up something [Mr. Slocum] said last week when asked the same question about Gorazde and your comments on Meet the Press. Mr. Slocum said he was right, we didn't go in there to stop the fall of Gorazde, because it's now essentially fallen. He made the distinction between taking a military action and just now that they're bombing innocent civilians, now we can go in.

It appears that the Bosnian Serbs are still trying to take territory. When they were withdrawing they were going after munitions plants and hospitals and certainly they wanted to get the Muslims out of there. That looked to me like they were trying to gain territory as well. And basically they've destroyed the place.

What distinction was he trying to make?

A: I'm not entirely sure I can answer that exact question, but I think it was very clear that the Serbian behavior in the last week or so in Gorazde, the last two weeks, I think, first of all, is egregious behavior. It was offensive in the extreme. It was shelling and attacking a more or less helpless city. Attacking and killing civilians in that city. And different from when I spoke a few weeks ago, it made an extensive use of heavy weapons and shelling. Therefore, it was quite open to the kind of a Sarajevo ultimatum which we had made before.

So I think given the introduction of heavy weapons and shelling in Gorazde, it was very appropriate to go to NATO and ask for an extension of the authority we had received in Sarajevo to Gorazde, whereas at the time we made the Sarajevo ultimatum, it would not have been a very useful thing to do.

We have, as you know also, at the time we did that asked for an extension of the same kind of authority in the other four safe haven areas, even though we don't need it there at this time. What we thought was that we would get that authority on the books so that if the Serbs were to go to one of those other safe haven areas, and to move their heavy weapons, move their artillery, and start shelling another city, we would already have the authority on the books to act.

Q: How about an exit strategy? Tell the American people about how we're going to get out of there.

A: First of all, I think it's important to note we're not in there. We are not a combatant in the war in Bosnia. There are many people who think we are, and there are other people who urge that we become a combatant in the war, but we have strongly resisted that, precisely because it's not clear what the exit strategy is if we are a combatant in the war.

The best judgment of the Joint Chiefs on the military situation in Bosnia is that is we were to take the position that we wanted to determine the outcome of that war and force the outcome to military action, we would have to enter as a combatant in the war and we would have to enter with substantial ground combatant forces. We're not prepared to recommend that. I don't believe the American people are prepared to accept that.

If we did that, then the exit strategy is dubious, indeed, because it could very well degenerate into a guerrilla warfare from the mountains, and we could very well be pinned down there for years. So we are resisting becoming a combatant in the war precisely because of the absence of an exit strategy.

In the peacekeeping which we're supporting now, the exit strategy is to achieve a peace. We are working very hard to achieve that. And while we're working to achieve the peace, we're working to minimize the civilian casualties that are occurring in the mean time. These various uses of air power, the limited use of air power, is precisely designed to minimize the civilian casualties while the main drama is proceeding, which is moving forward with the peace agreement.

Q: If the peace agreement goes nowhere, do we keep threatening air strikes? Do we bomb if they don't follow ultimatums? And if we don't do that, do you see us just leaving altogether?

A: Again, I want to emphasize that I believe that the primary function and the only function we can demonstrate we're achieving with the bombing now, with the air strikes now and the threat of air strikes, is the reduction of civilian casualties. It can be argued that it's also motivating the Serbs to move toward the peace table. I'm not sure that's right. But if it is, then that's another benefit to the use of the air power.

But my belief is that bombing people into a peace table is a dubious strategy, and we have to, instead, find diplomatic means for trying to effect the peace agreement.

We had a meeting in London yesterday -- Warren Christopher, the British, the Russians -- to discuss the formation of a new international group that would take on the task of trying to drive home a peace agreement in Bosnia. That's putting more energy into the peace agreements. We have been working very hard with the Muslims and the Croats so far, and have, I think, made real progress there in the framework peace agreement which was achieved there. But we think it's necessary to bring the Russians into it as well. They have some influence on the Serbs, and between their influence on the Serbs, and the Europeans' influence on

the Muslims and Croats, we hope we can bring them together into a final agreement.

Q: Can you see a time when you're trying to save civilian lives and the peacekeeping efforts are going on and we're only using the threat of air strikes where it's just not working? At what point do you just say this isn't working. We've got to [go in], people continue to die. Or is this an open ended peacekeeping operation, an open ended threat?

A: I think that's a decision that's primarily to be made by the countries that have peacekeeping forces on the ground -- the British and the French in particular. Each of them have several thousand forces on the ground. I know that they will reach a stage, whether it's this year or next year I can't predict, but they'll reach a stage where they see no progress or no hope for progress, that they will give up and pull the peacekeeping forces out. So there is some limit, some time limit, on how long we have to get this peace agreement. I can't put it in terms of months. But it's not because of our involvement in it, it's because of the people who have forces on the ground.

Our commitment at this time is to maintain those NATO air forces, air units down in Italy and in the Adriatic. That is a commitment of time and resources on our part, but a much bigger burden, at this time, is on the countries that have the forces on the ground.

Q: In the coming days, if heavy weapons are found within the exclusion zone around Gorazde, do you think there will be air strikes, or is there going to be a little leeway there? How heavy handed do you believe NATO and the UN will be in the coming days?

A: I believe that NATO and the UN will insist on compliance with this agreement. If they do not get compliance, they will call for air strikes. I expect there will be some ambiguity and uncertainty in verifying the extent to which compliance has been reached. We may, for example, find an artillery piece out there, and go and examine it and discover it's broken, it's non-functional. So there are uncertainties of that nature. But leaving those kinds of ambiguities out, setting the ambiguities aside, I believe that NATO and the United Nations will both agree that they need to insist on compliance with that agreement, and if we do not get compliance they will call for air strikes.

Q: On Korea, it probably seems like ages ago since you were there, if the North Koreans allow the IAEA to view the refueling, is that enough? What do the North Koreans have to do now to comply, in your eyes, to meet our demands?

A: First of all, our relationship with North Korea, our security problems with North Korea go beyond just the nuclear bomb program. But focusing on the

bomb program for a moment, the issue there is that we want them to, first of all, stop the development of that nuclear weapon program that they have. And secondly, if they already have a nuclear bomb or two, we want them to roll that back.

So we have two different objectives. The first objective could be achieved through the IAEA inspection. That is, the IAEA is intending to set up a safeguard system that oversees the activities at that nuclear reactor facility. And it would be sufficient to ensure that the fuel, plutonium, is not being diverted into a bomb program. So the IAEA has to more than be there. They have a set of measurements and inspections they have to make, and they very carefully spelled these out to the North Koreans. If the North Koreans comply with the terms of the IAEA inspection, then we will have assurance that the plutonium is not being diverted into a bomb program. So that is the number one objective, the primary objective.

The second objective is because they diverted some fuel from that reactor a few years ago when it was not under IAEA inspection, and we don't know what happened to that fuel. We are concerned they might have already made a bomb. To the extent that's true, we would like to get that bomb eliminated. The only provision we have following up on that is the North/South denuclearization agreement. They have made an agreement for a denuclearized peninsula, and various inspection means to follow up on that. So that's why it is important to get the North/South talks underway so they can follow up on that denuclearized peninsula agreement.

Q: In general, what was your impression of how things were going over there during your trip?

A: I was very pleased and very impressed with the attitude, the response of the South Korean government in how they're dealing with this problem. They're dealing with it calmly and firmly. We and the South Korean government are moving arm in arm, that is we have complete agreement on what our assessment of what the security problems are on the Korean Peninsula, and what actions we should jointly take to deal with them.

Q: What's been the hardest day for you as Secretary of Defense, in any sense of that word? Difficulties, certainly the friendly fire incident had to be horrible. What, to you, was the most difficult day here, and if you could describe what it was and what it was like.

A: The most difficult day was getting the news about the friendly, our shooting down of the helicopters in Iraq. I can't thin of any single bit of news I had that was harder to take. Then the second part of that hard news was going over to

tell the President about it. He took it just as hard as I did. Then from there, going out to talk to the families whose soldiers had been killed by it. That wasn't all one day, that happened over periods of days, but a whole set of activities surrounding that event.

First of all, the shock of the shoot-down; the concern about what had gone wrong; and the realization that we had to make a very thorough investigation to determine accountability and to correct whatever procedures we had that might be wrong; and then just dealing with the human tragedy of it. Without question that was...

The second worse day that follows right behind that had to do with the plane that landed in the middle of a group of Army soldiers about ready to go up for a parachute drop and killed and horribly burned a large number of them. Then going down to the hospital to meet those soldiers and the families, and the memorial services for the families of the ones that were killed. That's really the hard part of the job.

Q: I was struck yesterday, I just watched it on CNN but we were also carrying it live. You looked absolute stricken yesterday, I thought, during the memorial service. What was going through your mind?

A: Well, I had just come from talking with all the families. There is just, you can identify, relate to how they feel, but it's not the same as talking with them and getting the first-hand contact with the people who are suffering, and they were all deeply suffering. And it wasn't just that they were suffering because they had lost their loved ones, but they'd lost them in an accident, and I think it's true of all accidents, they shouldn't happen. So you on the one hand have the human tragedy, and then you have the concern about what you can do to change the circumstances so that accidents like that are not so likely to happen. You have to reduce from a very low probability to an infinitesimally low probability that actions like that will happen.

Q: Anything new on that investigation?

A: No. We have the investigation, we're about halfway through the investigation now. We probably have another two weeks before we have the full story on it.

Q: Can you say whether those switches were off in the helicopters?

A: I cannot confirm that at this time.

Q: Thank you, sir. I appreciate it.

DIRECTORATE FOR DEFENSE INFORMATION**DATE:** April 26, 1994**TIME:** 1 p.m.**PA REP:****QUERY FROM:** News Briefing**QUESTION:** Who initiated the call today between Secretary Perry and Minister Grachev?**ANSWER:** The call was initiated within Secretary Perry's office.**QUESTION:** Did the possible cancellation of the Russian exercise come as a surprise to the Pentagon? Did your experts know it was coming?**ANSWER:** We do not interpret President Yeltsin's remarks as an intention to cancel the U.S./Russian peacekeeping exercise. We continue to hold discussions and planning meetings with our Russian counterparts. In recent weeks, we have been aware of some domestic criticism; however that does not constitute Russian policy.**QUESTION:** What is the current location of the F-15 pilots involved in the Blackhawk incident?**ANSWER:** Incirlik, Turkey.**QUESTION:** What is the cost of subscriptions to news publications for Pentagon officials?**ANSWER:** Working.**QUESTION:** What is the status of putting the "Early Bird" on line by computer?**ANSWER:** The Early Bird is on line at 34 DoD sites worldwide on a test basis through the Defense Technical Information Center. We are working with DTIC on a Memorandum of Understanding to complete the details for actual on line procedures to go into effect. We expect the MOU to be signed in the near future.**QUESTION:** What's the agenda with the HASC this afternoon?**ANSWER:** Secretary informally briefed the SASC concerning his trip to Korea and Japan.